

SAT Strategies

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Triumph College Admissions



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General Test-Taking Strategies

In order to be prepared for the SAT, make sure you are familiar with the SAT format discussed in **Step 1: Overview**.

Pacing

Pacing is a big part of the SAT, especially now that it has been increased to almost 4 hours! Make sure to work as fast as you accurately can.

Do not spend too long on any one question. A difficult question is worth the same number of points as an easy one (about 10 points), so try to get to as many questions as you can.

Order of Difficulty

Questions are ordered from easy to medium to hard in most sections of the SAT (no order in passage-based reading and improving paragraph questions in the writing). Make sure to answer as many easy and medium ones as you can. If a question looks too difficult to do in a short amount of time, skip it.

Scoring

Remember that there is a penalty for guessing. Be sure to read the tips on guessing in this Test-Taking Strategies section.

- +1 point for every correct answer
- 0 points for every blank answer
- .25 points for every incorrect answer

No points are deducted for incorrect math grid-ins, so be sure to enter an answer.

Don't lose your place!

You might think this is unnecessary advice, but it's actually not that difficult to lose your place when you are quickly bubbling in answers. Check your answer sheet as you go along to make sure your answers match up.

Mark up your test booklet

Be sure to mark up your test booklet as you answer the questions. Think with your pencil as you work out math problems, circle key terms, and underline important information.

When selecting your answers, cross off any you know are definitely wrong. Circle the correct answer. If you lose your place later, you will have the answer recorded in your booklet.

If you come to a question that you know you will not be able to answer, put a large X next to it so later when you go back, you know not to waste your time on it.

If you come to a question that you know is difficult for you but one which you might be able to do if you have time, put a large question mark (?) next to it so later if you have time, you know that you should try this one.

Know the directions

Make sure you are VERY familiar with the directions for each section BEFORE the test. You do not want to waste precious time during the test to try to figure out tricky instructions.

Guessing on the SAT

To guess or not to guess, that is the question. Guessing on the SAT is a great way to help raise your SAT - if you do it right. The SAT scoring system is what makes guessing important. Let's review the scoring system before we go any further.

SAT Scoring System

<ul style="list-style-type: none">+1 point for every correct answer0 points for every question left blank0 points for an incorrect grid-in math question-0.25 points for every incorrect multiple-choice question
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Random Guessing

Random guessing is simply answering a question without trying to find the right answer. The scoring system is designed to eliminate any benefit from random guessing. If a million students randomly guessed on 5 multiple-choice questions, statistically the average student would get 1 right and 4 wrong. So using the SAT scoring system the raw score would be 0 (+1 - .25 -.25 -.25 -.25). Random guessing plays right into the hands of the SAT scoring system. So what should you do instead? The answer is educated guessing.

Educated Guessing

The SAT scoring system is based on percentages. You can change the percentages in your favor by eliminating wrong answers and then guessing from the remaining answers. Eliminating one wrong answer changes your odds of guessing the right answer from 1 in 5 to 1 in 4, and eliminating 3 answers takes your odds to 1 in 2 chances. Using educated guessing is a simple way to change the odds in your favor, but you need to be careful.

When to Guess

Remember why you're guessing on a question - you don't know the answer. The SAT knows that students guess, so to make it harder they add distracters to the answer choices. Distracters are very attractive answer choices, but they're wrong. The SAT hopes you'll see a distracter and jump at that answer. So even if you've eliminated one answer choice, there's a good chance that you'll still pick the wrong answer. It is our experience that students aren't very good guessers on the SAT because of the distracters. Here are our basic rules for guessing:

Three Simple Rules for Guessing on the SAT

- 1.If you have no clue how to answer the question, then definitely skip it.
- 2.If you can eliminate only one or two wrong answer choices, think twice before guessing
- 3.If you can eliminate three wrong answers, then definitely guess.

One note of caution: Think about your score goal for the math, critical reading, and writing sections: how many correctly answered questions do you need to achieve that score? There is no point trying to answer every question if you're trying to score a 550 or even a 600. On the other hand, don't skip so many questions that you don't answer enough to achieve your score.

If you're smart about your guessing, you can definitely raise your SAT score. Again, remember why you're guessing - you don't know the answer. The real key to raising your SAT score is to work on your weak skills identified by your diagnostic test and to build your vocabulary.

Studyguide for the SAT Math Strategies

Math Strategies

There is no substitute for not knowing the math skills required to answer SAT questions. However, if you can combine your math skills with these simple strategies, you should be able to score even higher on the math portion of the SAT. Try to use the strategies on the quiz questions and when you're reworking questions in step 5. The more you use them now, the better you'll be able to use them when you take your SAT.

Question Order Easy - Medium - Hard

Questions on the SAT are ranked easy, medium, and hard, based on the percentage of students who missed that question. Each math section begins with easy questions and ends with hard questions. On the section with "grid-in" questions the process restarts with the "grid-ins" so the first grid-in will typically be an easy question.

Use the question order to your advantage. Knowing where the hard questions are can help you decide when to skip a question.

Time Wasters

Whenever you see "which of the following could be true" or answers that are something like: **I only, I and III only, None of the Above** this usually signals a question that is set up as a time waster. The test writer wants you to work through all the answer choices beginning with (A) and waste time computing the answer. The best thing to do is to just skip the problem and come back to it if you have time

Backsolving

The answers for the multiple-choice questions are given to you in numerical order. Some of these questions can be answered by simply "plugging in" the answer choices and seeing if it solves the problem.

You should usually begin the backsolving process with answer choice (C). If (C) is too small a number for the answer, you can immediately eliminate any numbers smaller than (C). Then use the next largest number. That will either be the answer or the last choice is the answer (you shouldn't waste time checking the last answer). If (C) had been too large of a number, then you just reverse the process and now use the next smallest number.

If the answer choice affects both sides of the equation you can still use backsolving, but you'll need to use each answer choice until you find the right answer.

Eliminating Wrong Answers

Knowing your basic math rules can help you quickly eliminate wrong answers.

For example: positive \times negative = negative

So if a question asks if the product of 3 numbers is > 0 , what could be the possible answer? You can immediately eliminate any answer choices that are all negative or have an odd number of negatives (for example 1, 2, -5 or -5, -4, -1).

You need to be in the mindset to look for answer choices that are obviously wrong, based on your knowledge of simple math facts including properties of graphs, functions, and triangles.

Word Problems

Don't let word problems intimidate you. Often the math involved in a word problem is fairly simple; the trick is to turn the words into a math problem. You need to know which words and phrases mean add, subtract, multiply, divide, or equals. When you're converting words into variables, use the first letter as the variable. For example, apples would be the variable a . Be careful not to repeat variables.

Example:

Adam, Brett, and Cary ate a total of 21 pieces of candy. Brett ate half as many as Adam and Cary ate four times as many as Brett. How many pieces of candy did Adam eat?

Let A equal the candy Adam ate, B the candy Brett ate, and C the candy that Cary ate.

So $A + B + C = 21$ and

$B = A/2$ and $C = 4B$, Now substitute variables and solve for A.

$A + A/2 + 4(A/2) = 21$,

$7A = 42$

$A = 6$

Drawing a diagram is also very useful on word problems dealing with geometric shapes asking about the length of a side, size of an angle, area, perimeter, or volume. Just draw the picture right in the test booklet.

Solve for the Answer

One of the traps students often fall into is solving for the wrong thing on a question, for example, solving for the value of x when the question asks for the value of or some other expression.

When you are given 2 equations and asked for the value of some expression, try writing the equations one over the other and see if you can add, subtract or do something to the equations to get the expression the question is asking for.

Figures Not Drawn to Scale

Figures are always drawn to scale unless you see the words "figure not drawn to scale."

One of the reasons figures aren't drawn to scale is because the answer could be obvious if the figure were drawn to scale. For this reason you should, whenever possible, redraw the figure as close to scale as possible.

Using a Calculator - 5 Rules

Rule 1 - Don't Over Use It !

The SAT permits you to use a calculator. A graphing or scientific calculator is recommended; however, over-using a calculator can easily hurt your score. Most questions can be solved more quickly in your head, if you properly use the math skills taught in the skill lessons.

Rule 2 - Practice Beforehand

Make sure you are very comfortable with your calculator. All you need is a simple calculator that will multiply, divide, add and subtract. It wouldn't hurt to put fresh batteries in your calculator a week before the test.

Rule 3 - "Set up" the problem First in Your Test Booklet

Unless you are doing something very simple with your calculator, you should first jot down the expression you are solving in your test book. It's easy to forget one of the terms, unless you have the full expression written down.

Rule 4 - Double Check Each Number as You Go

After you input each number, check the display before you press the +, -, \div , x, or = key. It's really easy to put in an extra digit and multiply 5.43 times 1000 instead of 100!

Rule 5 - Calculators are not Required, but may be Helpful.

Actually, this is a restatement of the first rule, but it is so important that we are repeating it again:

DON'T GRAB YOUR CALCULATOR EVERY TIME
YOU SEE A FEW NUMBERS!!!!

ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE SHORTCUTS
THAT ARE TAUGHT IN THE SKILL LESSONS!!!!

SECTION STRATEGY: SENTENCE COMPLETIONS

A strong vocabulary and your knowledge of how the various parts of a sentence work together to create a logical statement are key elements for success when you tackle the sentence completion questions on the SAT.

Locate the Key Words

The SAT test item writers cannot simply compose a sentence and then remove a word for you to find in the answers. The sentence must contain a key word or group of words to help narrow the answer choices so that only one is correct. Your ability to find these key words is a critical skill.

Definitional

In a definitional sentence completion, the key words will be a definition. The answer is the word that is defined or explained. Study the following example. The key words are in italics and the answer is underlined.

Gary was confused by the dilemma in which he was caught, so he sought his mentor, *a man who was wise and experienced in solving such problems*.

The key words define a *mentor*, someone who provides guidance because he is wise and experienced.

Contrast

In a contrast sentence completion, the missing word or words will contrast with the key words. Another way to think of the missing words in a contrast sentence is that the answer choice will reverse, contradict, or oppose the key words. Study the following example. The key words are in italics and the answer is underlined.

Instead of studying the material *in depth*, Juanita gave the papers a cursory glance.

Cursory means to look over something quickly. It contrasts with the idea of looking at something *in depth*. In other words, cursory contradicts in depth.

Cause and Effect

In a cause and effect sentence completion, the key words and the missing word will form a logical cause-effect relationship. Another way to think about cause and effect sentences is to use a sentence pattern similar to *because of this, the result is that*. Study the following example. The key words are in italics and the answer is underlined.

Because she was adept with tools and machines, she earned a good reputation *for tuning engines effectively*.

Use your cause and effect sentence pattern test. Because she was adept with tools and machines, the result was that she earned a good reputation for tuning engines effectively.

Synonym

In a synonym sentence completion, the missing word or words will be a synonym or a synonymous idea for the key word. Although synonym completion sentences are not the most frequently used type on the SAT, it is important to be able to recognize them and answer them correctly. Study the following example. The key words are in italics and the answer is underlined.

President Franklin Roosevelt created numerous government programs during the 1930's to help *reverse* and nullify the Depression.

The word *nullify* means to void or cancel. Nullify is a synonymous idea for reverse.

Locate the Signal Words

Most sentence completions use signal words. These are important words that can help you determine the type of sentence completion. Using these words is another very helpful strategy for determining the correct answer.

Definitional

that is, in that it, in other words, likewise

Contrast

although, rather than, conversely, however, but, yet, unless, instead of, on the other hand, despite this/the, even/even though, nevertheless

Studyguide for the SAT Sentence Completion Strategies

Cause-Effect

because, in order to, therefore, if...then, as a result, since, so, hence, thus, consequently

Hint: *Because* is the most commonly used signal word for cause-effect sentence completions.

Synonym

and, beyond this, additionally, indeed, also, in fact, moreover, just as, furthermore, in a similar manner, as well as, in a like manner

Hint: *And* is the most commonly used signal word for synonym sentence completions.

Use the Positive and Negative Word Strategy

If the answer choices contain challenging vocabulary, or if you want to double check to see if your idea is on the right track, use the positive and negative word strategy. This is a very helpful strategy to use with synonym sentences. If the key word is positive (+), the missing word must also be positive (+) because synonyms are words that mean the same as one another. Naturally, if the key word is negative (-), the missing word must also be negative (-).

Remember that all words have both a denotation or dictionary definition and connotation or mental association. Denotations and connotations will be positive (+) or negative (-).

Map the Sentence Direction

All sentences have some logical order to the parts that are contained in them. If no logical order were present, the sentence would not make any sense.

By identifying the logical order of a sentence, you are determining how the parts relate to one another. This is called mapping the direction of the sentence.

If the sentence completion has only one blank and the direction of the sentence is positive, look for a + word in the answer choices and quickly eliminate any - words. Notice how the following sentence is mapped.

Studyguide for the SAT Sentence Completion Strategies

The *barbs* (-) by the chairman are *caustic* (-) and create hurt feelings within the committee members.

The movement of the sentence is negative, so you are looking for a negative word as the answer. Any positive words can be quickly eliminated.

Double Blank Sentence Completions

In double blank sentence completions, work with one blank at a time. Start with the one that seems easier.

If possible, use the positive-negative strategy with the double blank sentence completions. If you know the first blank is a positive word, go down your list of answers and cross off any choices that have a negative word for the first blank. Then go back and do the same thing for the second blank.

Notice in the following example that the first blank is a positive (+) word. When you go down the list, you can cross off choices (B) and (D) because the first blank is not a positive word.

As __+__ as she is __+__, Sarah has combined commitment and perseverance to succeed as a triathlete.

- | | | | |
|-----|-------------|-----|----------|
| | + | | + |
| (A) | industrious | ... | vigilant |
| | - | | + |
| (B) | lethargic | ... | talented |
| | + | | + |
| (C) | dedicated | ... | diligent |
| | - | | + |
| (D) | indifferent | ... | skilled |
| | + | or | - |
| (E) | absorbed | ... | inept |

Now look at the second blank: you need another positive word. Cross off choice (E) because "inept" is a negative word. You're left with choices (A) and (C). "Vigilant" means to be "watchful," so cross it off because it doesn't fit the meaning. The answer is (C).

Studyguide for the SAT Sentence Completion Strategies

Punctuation Clues

Sometimes the punctuation in a sentence completion can help you find the correct answer.

For example, often if you see a blank followed by a colon (:), you will often find the definition of the blank in the words that come after the colon.

The analysis was extremely ____: it covered all of the issues in great detail.

(A) meticulous (B) superficial (C) diffident (D) callous (E) aloof

The answer is A, "meticulous," which means "extremely detailed." The definition of the blank is found in the sentence that comes after the colon.

Frequently, a blank followed by a comma is a clue that the definition will be located directly after the comma.

Although Susan enjoys socializing with friends, at times she prefers ____, spending quiet time alone.

(A) suspense (B) ceremony (C) solitude (D) longevity (E) prosperity

The answer is C, "solitude," which means "being alone." The definition of the blank is found in the phrase that comes after the comma.

Prefixes and Roots

Use your knowledge of word parts to help you determine the correct answer. Sometimes simply remembering a prefix or root will lead you to the right answer.

For example, if you see the word "malediction," you can guess that it means "saying bad things" because you know that the prefix "mal" means "bad" as in "maladjusted," and "diction" has to do with words as in "dictionary."

Studyguide for the SAT Sentence Completion Strategies

In summary, the strategies for helping answer sentence completion questions correctly help you accomplish the following:

They help you save time.

They help you eliminate wrong answers quickly.

They help you determine the direction of the sentence.

They help you determine the type of sentence completion.

Critical Reading Strategies

How to approach the critical reading passages

The first question you need to answer for yourself is, "Do I read for speed or comprehension?" These are two seemingly, mutually exclusive tasks. For the SAT you should be reading somewhere in between the two extremes. The questions come from only about 25 percent of the information in a typical passage. Therefore, don't think you need to remember everything you read but, don't gloss over key facts. As we stressed in the reading skills, read as much as you can and practice the skills you have learned. Read newspaper or magazine articles and College-level books. Critical reading means active reading. As you read, you should ask yourself questions, look for the main idea, determine the author's tone or attitude.

Always read the introduction

Each passage has a short introduction in italics. Don't skip this introduction since it will help you understand the passage and may even define words and point out names you need to know.

Underline as you read

To help you to read critically, you should underline key points as you read. This will help you to build a mental outline of the passage and your marks will be handy references when you refer back. Pay particular attention to the first and last couple of sentences in each paragraph.

Passage-Based Reading Strategies

Should I read the passage first or the questions first?

The answer to this question depends on what kind of reader you are. If you are a fast reader, you might want to read the questions first (NOT the answers) to get an idea of what you're looking for.

If you are a slower reader, you should read the passage first. SAT long reading passages have 6 to 12 questions per passage-that's a lot to remember!

Practice both ways BEFORE the test so that you know which way works better for you.

Note: For the short reading passages, you should read the questions first (not the answers) and THEN read the passage.

Read just above and below the question's reference line

It's okay to refer back to the passage after reading a question. As a matter of fact, you should expect to do it since the questions can be very challenging. The test writers help you with this by giving you a line or paragraph reference in the question. Get into the habit of reading the line above and below the line reference. This will help you to understand inferences, vocabulary-in-context and tone.

Long Paired Passages—Divide and Conquer

There will be one set of long paired passages on the SAT. There will be some questions about the first passage, some about the second passage, and some about both passages as a pair. The best strategy for handling long paired passages is to divide and conquer:

- * read passage one and answer the passage one questions
- * read passage two (think about how it relates to passage 1)
and answer the passage two questions
- * Answer the questions about both passages

Identifying which questions apply to which passage is easy! Just look for the line references in the question to see to which passage the question refers.

Writing Strategies

Tips on Writing the Essay

- *Choose ONE point of view and stick with it.
- *Jot down a brief outline before you start writing the essay.
- *Use an attention-grabbing introduction.
- *Make sure to include specific, detailed examples to support your point of view.
- *Fully develop your ideas: essays of 1 page or less generally receive lower scores, while essays of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 pages receive higher scores.

Tips on Multiple-Choice Writing

"Listen" for the error as you read the sentence.

Be sure to read all the answers before making your selection.

Read each answer choice VERY carefully. Some answers may differ by just one punctuation mark.

Remember, some of the sentences will NOT contain an error.